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INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

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STATE FOR AF/SPG, PRM, AND ALSO PASS USAID/W
USAID FOR DCHA SUDAN TEAM, AF/EA, DCHA
NAIROBI FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA, USAID/REDSO, AND FAS
USMISSION UN ROME
GENEVA FOR NYLOH
NAIROBI FOR SFO
NSC FOR JMELINE, TSHORTLEY
USUN FOR TMALY
BRUSSELS FOR PLERNER

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - TEXT ON SECTION 01

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: EAID PREF PGOV PHUM SOCI KAWC SU

SUBJECT: NRC EVACUATES FROM SOUTH DARFUR

REF: (A) Khartoum 0320 (B) (05) Khartoum 1350

Summary

¶1. On February 21, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) evacuated international staff members working in South Darfur. NRC international headquarters made the determination to remove staff in response to weeks of Sudanese government warnings that the safety of NRC staff could not be guaranteed. The work of NRC is particularly critical in Darfur's largest internally displaced person (IDP) camp, Kalma, where the organization works as camp coordinator. It is unknown how long the organization will be absent from South Darfur, and NRC is currently reviewing its ability to continue operations. NRC is working urgently with other humanitarian agencies to cover its operations on the ground, particularly in Kalma. End summary.

Causes

¶2. On February 20, the South Darfur Commissioner of the Sudanese government Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) verbally directed NRC expatriate staff to leave Nyala purportedly due to security concerns. NRC refused to leave, however, unless the HAC issued a signed order instructing the organization to do so. On February 21, NRC's international headquarters in Oslo, Norway, made the determination to relocate all NRC expatriate staff to Khartoum, without the issuance of an official letter by HAC officials.

History

¶3. In relation to the continued fallout over the cartoon controversy, South Darfur HAC officials verbally ordered NRC staff to leave the state on February 8. Again, HAC stated it had issued the order because the security of NRC staff "could not be guaranteed." After intensive advocacy by several donors and the U.N. Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Khartoum-based HAC Commissioner intervened and decreed that NRC did not have to leave Nyala, claiming to be unaware that such a statement had been made (reftel A).

¶4. The issue of NRC as Kalma camp coordinator has been highly contentious for some time. In August 2005, the HAC refused to renew its agreement with NRC for this purpose. At that time, USAID documented the critical humanitarian and protection services provided by NRC in the camp of nearly 90,000 persons in the cable listed as reftel B. In addition to many other functions, NRC provides analysis and advocacy on the human rights issues and sexual violence occurring in Kalma, which many would argue is the source of the government's discontent with the organization. After a strong request by Deputy Secretary of State Zoellick, the government allowed NRC to resume the camp coordination role on November 15 on the condition that NRC could not engage in protection-related matters.

Humanitarian Implications

¶5. NRC's absence will leave a considerable humanitarian gap, as its role as Kalma camp coordinator is even more crucial in light of the heightened insecurity and displacement in South Darfur. NRC is working to coordinate with other NGOs operational in Kalma to take over camp coordination, but the issue has not been resolved. As an interim measure, OCHA and the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) Civilian Police (CIVPOL) will cooperate to fill in the gaps left by NRC's departure. Two issues of particular concern are the registration of new arrivals and the continuation of joint Sudanese police and AMIS CIVPOL firewood patrols to protect women collecting firewood, which NRC is instrumental in facilitating.

¶6. Without camp coordination, the camp can become destabilized quickly. For example, on February 16, approximately 50 Arab militia approached Kalma camp on horseback and intimidated IDPs in response to reported cattle theft in Nyala. NRC reacted quickly to alert the AMIS protection force, who deployed to calm the situation. Despite the South Darfur Wali also being immediately informed, it took 12 hours for the police forces to arrive in Kalma.

Next Steps

¶7. NRC is currently reviewing its ability to operate in Darfur given the continued restrictions on its work imposed by the government. Embassy Khartoum is coordinating with Norwegian government representatives here and will follow this situation closely.

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